

## Living with Snakes and other Reptiles

by Simon Watharow

Publisher: CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, 2011. 160 pages, paperback, colour photographs.

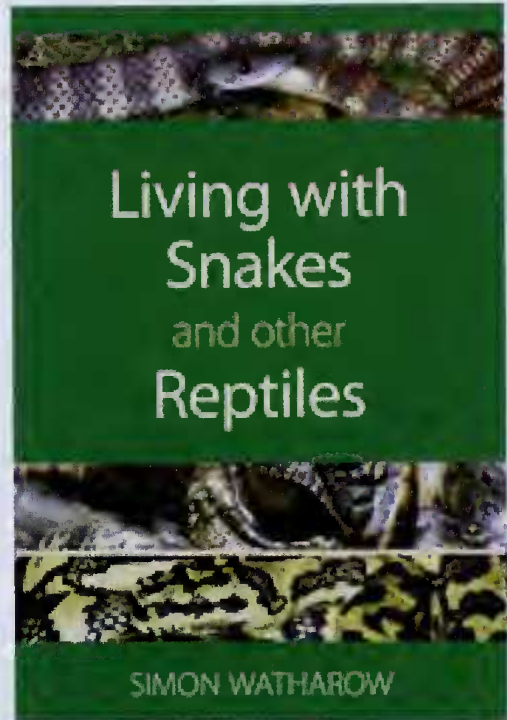
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Simon Watharow has encountered more snakes in a single year than most of us will in a lifetime — even those of us who spend a lot of time outdoors. For many years Simon was one of Melbourne's most in-demand snake catchers. Not only did that experience endow him with a wealth of firsthand knowledge about snakes and their habits, it also taught him a great deal about people who encounter snakes, and the factors that tend to favour unwanted interactions between people and reptiles.

These encounters fuelled Simon's passion to help people keep themselves and their families and pets safe, while engendering some respect for these most reviled animals. And I say 'reviled' in an informed sense — a study by Davies *et al.* (2004) showed that, of all the animals that Australians might encounter around their home, snakes were the least desired. As a consequence, most people who have found a snake near (or even in!) their home are hungry for knowledge of how to minimise risks and further encounters.

*Living with Snakes and other Reptiles* is the distillation of Simon's experience and expertise on this topic. The book provides considerable detail around the biology and ecology of commonly encountered snake species, and the nature of interactions between humans and snakes. However, it is well into the book in the chapters titled 'Snakes around your house' and 'Handling a snake visit' that I think most snake-spooked folk will quickly gravitate. Herein lies the accumulated wisdom from Simon about the factors that lead to a snake being on your property, and what to do about it.

One of the most important sections of this book details snakebite first aid and antivenoms. Omitting this information is something that concerns me in modern herpetological books, so I applaud this inclusion.



Another valuable inclusion is the 'Useful contacts' section at the back of the book. The 'References' section contains some useful literature, but the omission of *Snakes of Victoria: a Guide to their Identification* by Coventry and Robertson is a shame, as this text, although now a little dated, remains the most useful state-level guide to Victorian snakes.

The writing style is rather colloquial, and some typographical errors could confuse, such as the use of the word 'lazing' instead of 'living' (p. 97), 'autonomy' instead of 'autotomy' (p. 142), and the provision of the Victorian Department of Primary Industries website instead of the website for the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

The species accounts provide general information on a selection of species, but are a little inconsistent. Distribution and dietary information is provided for some species but not others, and some of the specific information is inaccurate. For example: the Common Tree Snake *Dendrelaphis punctulata* does not occur in Victoria (p. 51); and Tiger Snakes *Notechis scutatus* occur at altitudes higher than 900 m (p. 60) in the Victorian alps (at places such as Dinner Plain where they occur at over 1500 m).

The comparison of legless lizards with snakes is not completely accurate. Whilst it is true that, unlike snakes, most Pygopodid lizards have an obvious external ear aperture, lizards in the genus *Aprasia* do not have such an opening. Similarly, although the movements of Pygopodids are described here as 'distinctively lizard-like' (p. 102), there is no doubt that many propel themselves using lateral undulation, just like a snake.

The information in the Appendix is also a little inaccurate or outdated in places. The Brown Snake *Pseudonaja nuchalis* does not occur in New South Wales (p. 135) or South Australia (p. 136) — in these states this snake is now known to be *P. aspidorhyncha*. In Victoria, the Diamond Python occurs only in East Gippsland, where it is rare; consequently, it is unlikely to be a 'common nuisance' snake (as per the title of the table) in this state. It is unlikely

that File Snakes (Acrochordids) are a 'nuisance' in the Northern Territory (p. 139); also, for the Northern Territory both crocodiles and the Cane Toad *Bufo marinus* are listed in a table of 'nuisance snakes', and the Cane Toad is listed under 'Introduced reptiles' of Queensland.

The latest information on the implications of envenomation from even small elapid snakes suggests that bites from all species have the potential to cause serious medical issues. Consequently, the description (starting on p. 76) that some of the smaller elapid snakes are 'considered harmless' should be viewed with caution.

Despite these minor glitches, the sections most relevant to the book's title undoubtedly hit their mark. If you want to know the best way to avoid or manage unwanted interactions with snakes, this is the book for you.

#### References

- Coventry AJ and Robertson P (1991) *The Snakes of Victoria: a Guide to their Identification*. (Department of Conservation and Environment: East Melbourne)  
 Davies RG, Webber LM and Barnes GS (2004) Urban wildlife management – it's as much about people! In *Urban Wildlife: More Than Meets the Eye*. Eds D Lunney and S Burgin. (Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales: Sydney)

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## Killers in Eden: The story of a rare partnership between men and killer whales

by Danielle Clode

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One has to feel a bit envious of Danielle Clode. She commences this book with a reflection on her experiences sailing around the Australian coast with her parents when she was young, and she finishes with reference to time spent researching in such places as the Scottish Hebrides and Iceland. Her biography gives further tantalising hints of a life devoted to study-

ing and writing about what was once called 'natural history'. However, she has at least one major regret — in all her travels she has never seen a Killer Whale *Orcinus orca*, the subject of this book.

Dr Clode recounts how, while on that sailing trip around Australia, she visited the Eden Killer Whale Museum and became fascinated